

Proactive Approach to Recruitment

The nation-wide shortage of healthcare workers has become a well-known fact. VA Puget Sound is taking a proactive approach to recruitment efforts. "We have a broad range of employment activities, particularly for hard-to-fill positions, such as pharmacists, medical technologists, diagnostic radiology technologists and nurses," says Bobbie Navarrete, human resources staffing specialist.

"Benefits of federal employment are a plus for prospective employees," says Don Kelly, personnel management specialist. "We offer a wide range of health insurance options, with no exclusion for pre-existing conditions. In addition, VA Puget Sound offers transit subsidies, child care subsidies and a new long term care insurance." Equitable pay scales to comparable community positions and sign-on or retention bonuses may also be factored into any hard-to-fill recruitment efforts. "The guaranteed federal retirement benefits are also important to prospective employees," Kelly says.

Frank Yunker, director of clinical support, highlights the recent work area changes that enhance recruitment and retention. "Over the past year, pharmacy has initiated state-of-the-art pharmacy robotic dispensing systems in the inpatient and outpatient settings. This automation is fully integrated into a computerized patient record to help improve medication use safety and efficiency. It has also helped pharmacists focus on activities that promote optimal medication outcomes." Pharmacy residents and students consistently rate their training experience at VA Puget Sound as one of the best in the area. "Our best recruitment success over the years comes from these pharmacy trainees," adds Yunker. John Harley, M.D., chief of radiology, says, "State-of-the-art equipment and a friendly collegiate atmosphere are important factors that help recruit and retain radiology staff." VA Puget Sound enjoys a close collaborative relationship with UW and other area schools. Radiologists and technologists acquire and interpret radiological images using modern digital imaging techniques. Digital images are stored with the veteran's electronic medical record. Bonuses for radiology staff may be offered where appropriate. "We would like to explore a tuition reimbursement incentive for new radiology staff," Dr. Harley adds.

Grass Roots Leadership

VA Puget Sound Health Care System is offering Operational Leadership Series (OLS) training to managers, supervisors and team leaders. This training is the second part of the Northwest Network High Performance Development Model (HPDM), and is the next step in integrating the principles and practices of HPDM into VA Puget Sound's business practices. The purpose of Core Competency Leadership Series (CCLS) was to improve critical thinking skills of executives and managers. The purpose of OLS is to provide knowledge and skill sets consistent with principles taught in the CCLS program to supervisors leading work units and teams.

Health Plan Management served as the pilot for the OLS training at VA Puget Sound. Tom McWhinnie, deputy director, Center for Education and Development, worked with Health Plan Management to develop a coaching series for supervisors to improve relationships between supervisor and employee. The target audience for this training series was managers, supervisors, team leaders and employees GS-7 and above.

Sessions were conducted every two weeks to reinforce development of supervisory skill sets and to provide continuity for the learning environment. Staff exercises addressed understanding self, performance contracts, performance measurements, using coaching instead of micro-management, observation and providing feedback.

Health Plan Management's goal is to further develop its employees, to improve the quality of the work environment and to organize the service line to allow for upward mobility for staff who

(Continued on page 8)

Quality in Action

Quality

Balanced Scorecard – July 2002

Balanced Scorecards were developed in the early 1990's to review organizational performance as it relates to mission, goals and strategic plan. Traditional balanced scorecards measure various aspects called "domains."

Using a model developed by Robert S. Kaplan and David P. Norton, both VISN 20 and VA Puget Sound have created a set of Balanced Scorecard measures under five domains of care. All measures are weighted according to their importance in the strategic plan. Quarterly reports are evaluated to track quality and plan important changes. Through the development of our own scorecard, we have a better understanding of local concerns and priorities.

Some of the VA Puget Sound measures are the same as VISN 20's, while others are specific to this facility. Examples of measures by domain include:

Access - reviews new appointment availability in primary care and specialty clinics

Quality - rates how we provide emergency services, and complete patient assessments

Cost - assesses cost per patient treated, lab, radiology and pharmacy costs

Customer Satisfaction - compares quarterly patient surveys completed by both inpatient and outpatients

Learning and Growth - evaluates patient education related to heart failure, and assesses employee education and competency

Annually, the strategic plan and scorecard measures are evaluated to address any changes to goals and objectives. The data is collected and defined so that it accurately reflects veterans' needs.

Why Nurses Matter

Registered Nurses (RNs) comprise the largest percentage of health care professionals. Nationally, health care facilities are experiencing a crisis in nursing numbers, resulting in an unprecedented nursing shortage. The American Nurses Association (ANA) is predicting that this shortage is due to an accelerated retirement of our current RN workforce and the health care demands of the baby boom generation. The local admissions offices claim that enrollment numbers are only the tip of the problem. The real concern is the number of nurses leaving the bedside as large numbers reach retirement age nationally.

Two VA nurses, one beginning her VA career and one male nurse well into his VA career, were asked their views. The new graduate was attracted to the opportunity to work in critical care. She stated the ICU has a good reputation. The more

experienced nurse stated that the work environment, the professionalism and working with the veteran population keeps him here.

There are several programs in place to increase our nursing recruitment and retention efforts, including the Nurse Reinvestment Act, which funds public service announcements to advertise the rewards of a nursing career and educational initiatives. In VA, the Future Nursing Workforce Planning Group has existed since August of 2000. They have made recommendations concerning retention, recruitment and utilization to make VA competitive with the private sector in attracting nurses. Tuition reimbursement and referral incentives have also been added to recruitment strategies. For more information on nursing careers, call the Nurse Recruiter at (206) 764-2487.

VA Supports Employee Advanced Training

Valrie Wilhelm is a nursing assistant in the Transitional Care Unit at VA Puget Sound who is attending nursing school at Highline Community College. She has just completed her first academic year and has one year remaining to receive her registered nursing degree. Through VA's Employee Incentive Scholarship Program (EIP), Valrie qualified for VA assistance (up to \$10,000/academic year) for tuition and books in her nursing program. In turn, Valrie is obligated to work for VA for a

period not to exceed three years. Valrie spent six years in the U.S. Army before joining VA Puget Sound. Besides taking a major pay cut to work part-time to attend school full time, Valrie has also had to fine tune her organization skills, not the least of which is to set aside time each week to spend with her husband.

If you are interested in learning more about EISP, contact Lin Hoisington at the Center for Education & Development, (206) 277-6717

Veterans

OUR FAMILY, OUR FRIENDS

VISN 20 – Northern Alliance Compensation and Pension Examinations

Alliance facilities conduct Compensation and Pension (C&P) examinations to assist Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) in assessing medical claims. VBA Regional Offices determine service connected disability or non-service connected pension payments to veterans. To receive disability compensation, a link must be proved between their military service and the condition claimed and that the condition is disabling. In addition to monthly compensation or pension checks, this process is the basis for eligibility in VA's health care system.

Improving the C&P process is one of the highest priorities of Secretary of Veterans Affairs Principi. Recently passed legislation by the U.S. Congress has resulted in as many as 250,000 claims needing to be re-evaluated. This has created a huge backlog for all regional offices and C&P units. To that end, VA Puget Sound Health Care System and Seattle VARO participated in the first National C&P Collaborative Project as the VISN 20 representative

team. The collaborative jointly improved timeliness, customer satisfaction, patient education, and quality of C&P exams.

Puget Sound data showed an increase in exams requested from 9,232 to 11,514 (24.7%) for the most recent 12-month period compared to the prior year, timeliness of C&P exams improved by 28% (from 33.6 days to 24.2 days), and the percentage of completed exams meeting VARO criteria for rating purposes improved by 50% (from an average of 98.4% to 99.2%).

CPEP - Puget Sound, Spokane, Roseburg and White City have just begun the second Collaborative Compensation and Pension Evaluation Project (CPEP). Designed to improve the quality and timeliness of C&P exams, the two collaboratives will ensure that the area's veterans receive their entitled benefits. For more information about Compensation and Pension Exams contact (206) 764-2140.

What is a Means Test?

Most non-service connected veterans and non-compensable 0% service-connected veterans are required to complete an annual Means Test. This test is a measure of a veteran's family income and assets during the previous year. Completing the Means Test allows VA to accurately determine veteran eligibility and assign each patient to an appropriate priority group. Placement in a priority group will determine what, if any, co-payments will be required for care or medications received through VA. Those who are required to make co-payments and have health insurance coverage should let us know. VA may be able to bill the insurance company to assist with co-payments. For more information on the Means Test, call: 800-329-8387 (Seattle) or (253) 582-8440, extension 76542 (American Lake).



Nancy Martin

On May 23, 2001 Nancy Martin contacted Kathy Gerard, social worker of the Homeless Women Veterans Program (HWVP). At the time she was desperate, "I became homeless because of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), domestic violence, not being able to find a job, and substance abuse." Nancy had no income or medical insurance and was not eligible for public assistance. She had enlisted in the Army in 1976 and served as a unit clerk in Germany through 1979. She needed treatment for her PTSD and substance abuse problems and found hope from an HWVP flyer. "The womens program helped to build my self esteem, referred me for treatment for my health issues and guided me to programs that addressed my employability. They gave me the support I needed to turn my life around."

Kathy helped Nancy connect with the Women's Addiction Program at VA, access treatment for her PTSD, and learn about services available through the Homeless Veterans Care Line. Nancy graduated from the Domiciliary Care Program for Homeless Veterans, is living in her own apartment (thanks in large part to the Veterans Affairs Supported Housing program) and has begun working as a customer service representative for a local business. Kathy continues to provide follow-up and case management as needed.

Breakthroughs

New Research on the Role of Ghrelin

Obesity, a disease linked to other health complications such as heart disease and diabetes, is one of the fastest growing epidemics in the world according to David Cummings, M.D., staff physician and researcher at VA Puget Sound Health Care System and the University of Washington. He and his colleagues have discovered that ghrelin stimulates hunger and short-term food intake in humans. The research has shown that ghrelin levels rise shortly before a meal and fall shortly after a meal. Negative energy balances, such as low-calorie diets, chronic exercise, cancer, anorexia, cardiac cachexia, and anorexia nervosa can cause ghrelin levels to increase. Most recently, gastric bypass surgery has been shown to suppress ghrelin levels in patients.



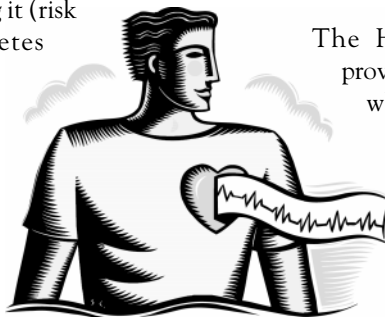
David Cummings

“Our research has shown that ghrelin has a compensatory rather than causal role in common obesity,” explains Dr. Cummings. “For example, people with Prader-Willi syndrome, which is the most common form of syndromic obesity, experience significantly elevated ghrelin levels, which may contribute to the severe obesity that is associated with Prader-Willi Syndrome. Our findings show a physiologic role for ghrelin in short- and long-term regulations of human appetite and body weight.”

Dr. Cummings’s research was recently highlighted in over 50 local and national media outlets.

Healthy Heart Program

Coronary artery disease is a common problem in the veteran population and one in which good patient education is paramount for optimal treatment and prevention. Kenneth Lehman, M.D., Staff Cardiologist, and his team have initiated a program at VA Puget Sound’s Seattle division to address the need for patient education, called the Healthy Heart Program. This is a one-time, two-hour educational opportunity for veterans (and their family members) with known coronary artery disease (CAD), at high risk for developing it (risk factors include diabetes mellitus (DM) or peripheral vascular disease (PVD)). A cardiologist, an exercise physiologist and a dietitian cover symptoms, diagnosis and treatment teach the class. It emphasizes modifiable risk factors, such as



smoking, diet, and exercise, along with local and community resources available to help lower these risks. The team underscores the importance of self-empowerment by providing patients with their recent blood pressure, basal metabolism index, cholesterol (LDL and HDL), and hemoglobin A1C levels with target values and practical ways to achieve these goals. Heart healthy snacks are served as an additional perk. These sessions are offered on an “as needed” basis, typically on the first Tuesday of each month at 1:00 p.m.

The Healthy Heart team asks providers to consider this program when seeing a patient with CAD, DM or PVD. Providers can refer patients by sending a consult request to the Healthy Heart Program, and they will do the rest. Patients who are interested should discuss this program with their provider.

Look AHEAD Project

The Look AHEAD project is the first clinical research to look at the long-term health effects of weight loss in men and women who are overweight and have type 2 diabetes. The study is sponsored by the National Institutes of Health. About 5000 people, ages 45-75, who have type 2 diabetes will participate in 16 centers nation-wide. The primary objective is to examine the long-term effects of an intensive lifestyle intervention program designed to achieve and maintain weight loss by decreased caloric intake and increased physical activity.

Weight loss has many short-term benefits, but what is not known is whether these



Action for Health in Diabetes

benefits last over many years. This project will help understand the long-term effects of weight loss on health, especially on heart attack and stroke.

For more information, contact the Look AHEAD Study at (206) 764-2768 or www.lookAHEADstudy.org

Heart Attack Symptoms Different In Women!

Heart disease and heart attacks claim the lives of more American women than men each year and pose a greater threat to American women than all forms of cancer combined. Unfortunately, many women do not know that the symptoms of a woman having a heart attack can be significantly different from those of a man.

Chest pain or pressure is a common symptom of heart attack. Cardiac chest pain is often vague or dull and may be described as a pressure or band-like sensation, squeezing, heaviness, or other discomfort. Heart attacks frequently occur from 4:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. due to higher adrenaline amounts released during the morning hours. Increased adrenaline in the bloodstream can contribute to plaque rupture. Interestingly, heart attacks do not usually happen during exercise, although exercise is commonly associated with exertional angina. Approximately one quarter of all heart attacks are silent, without chest pain. In diabetics, the incidence of "silent" heart attacks may be much higher. The pain or discomfort of a heart attack may be very mild despite its ominous implications.

For this reason, patients may attribute the symptoms to indigestion, fatigue, stress, or other common maladies. Denial is also a common element which can dangerously delay one's seeking medical attention. Prompt medical attention in the presence of these kinds of symptoms is critical to survival.

The symptoms for women having a heart attack are often different from

those of men, but any of the following symptoms can occur in both:

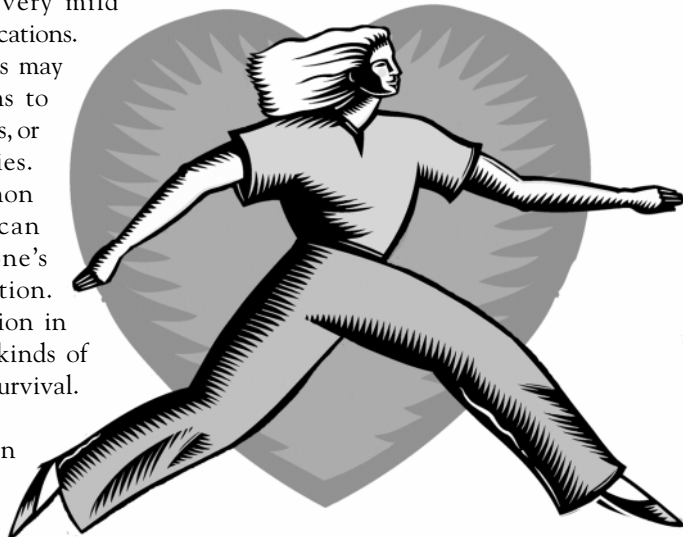
Classic Symptoms

- Squeezing chest pain or pressure
- Shortness of breath
- Sweating
- Tightness in chest
- Pain spreading to shoulders, neck or arm

Symptoms More Likely in Women

- Indigestion or gas-like pain
- Dizziness, nausea or vomiting
- Unexplained weakness, fatigue
- Discomfort/pain between shoulder blades
- Recurring chest discomfort
- Sense of impending doom

Talk to your doctor regularly about your heart health. Be proactive by bringing this topic up for discussion. Ask for a thorough assessment of your heart disease risk factors: family history, cholesterol – both LDL and HDL – triglycerides, glucose (blood sugar) levels, blood pressure, smoking history, weight, stressors and exercise. Formulate a plan with your doctor to eliminate or reduce them.



New Urology Program Open

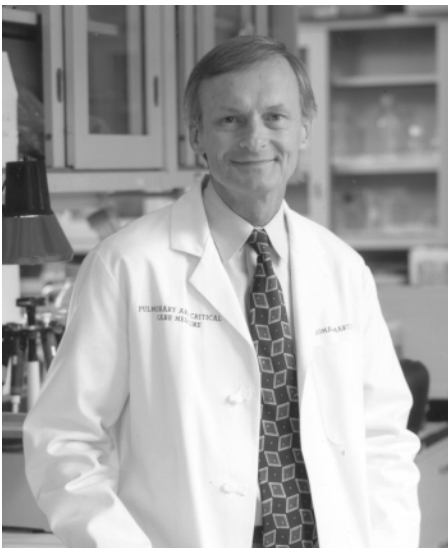
A new multidisciplinary Urologic Oncology program for the evaluation and treatment of VISN 20 patients with prostate cancer is open at VA Puget Sound's Seattle Division. The clinic is designed to help patients with prostate cancer of all types and give them the opportunity to discuss their therapeutic options with a broad range of care providers, including urologists, radiation oncologists, medical oncologists and endocrinologists, who treat patients with this disease. By providing this type of integrated patient care, doctors hope to help patients make informed decisions and receive the best possible treatment. The clinic team also provides psychosocial and nutritional support. The multidisciplinary team offers some of the most advanced treatment options available, including nerve sparing prostate surgery, brachytherapy (radiation implants), adjuvant chemotherapy, and vaccine trials. The team is part of the program in Prostate Cancer Research coordinated through the University of Washington and the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center. For information and referrals, call Urology at 764-2265 or Oncology at 277-6590. More information regarding the clinic is available at http://www.va.gov/psprostate_c/

IN THE NEWS

American Thoracic Society Elects New President

Thomas R. Martin, M.D., director of Primary and Specialty Medical Care at VA Puget Sound Health Care System, was recently installed as president of the American Thoracic Society. Dr. Martin was sworn in for a one-year term on May 21, 2002, during the 98th International Conference of the American Thoracic Society in Atlanta, Georgia.

Dr. Martin is a professor of medicine in the Division of Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine and vice chair of the Department of Medicine at the University of Washington. He founded the Pulmonary Research Laboratories at VA Puget Sound's Seattle division. His multidisciplinary research program investigates mechanisms of inflammation, injury and host defense in the lungs. His studies have been funded continuously by the National Institutes of Health and the Department of Veterans Affairs.



Thomas R. Martin

Jessie Ahroni Receives Distinguished Service Award

Jessie Ahroni, ARNP, PhD, nurse practitioner in Research and Development at VA Puget Sound, was recently awarded the Distinguished Service Award by the Washington Association of Diabetes Educators. Jessie was recognized for advancing the role of diabetes education as central to diabetes care. She has worked within the state and country promoting

development of other educators on the subject. Jessie has enhanced the quality of diabetes education, as well as diabetic foot and ulcer care, demonstrating that education is an integral part of quality diabetes care. Jessie's main responsibility is as Research Coordinator for the diabetic foot study. Congratulations!



Jessie Ahroni

Gates Foundation Grant Awarded to Partners Program

The Partners Program is a collaborative effort between VA Puget Sound Health Care System's Seattle division and Seattle Schools. Recently, the program received a two-year \$35,000 grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation through the Alliance for Education, the fund raising arm of Seattle Schools.

Started in April of 1997 by Nurse Executive, Frankie Manning, RN, the Partners Program works with students from neighboring Asa Mercer Middle School. Students must volunteer for 40 hours of training and orientation and are paid minimum wage for their hours of service. Part of their experience includes hearing from veterans about their military service and what they did for their country.

In addition to providing valuable support, students also find out first hand about health care careers. They learn to take vital signs; feed, transport, and assist patients; enter computer data; and work in the library and research offices.

This past May, 120 students from an enrollment of 800 at Mercer Middle School attended a Partners orientation. Sixty-nine submitted applications, of which 12 were accepted. To date, this youth development program has recruited and trained 62 students from Mercer Middle School.

Six students from the original class are outstanding examples of what can happen to young people who receive mentoring and training. Four of the original group are working part-time at the hospital while putting themselves through college. One is working full time at the hospital as a nursing aide while attending night school, and another is a ward clerk.

The Partners Program is an excellent, creative example of how to attract and train potential health care workers at a time when they are most needed. Thanks to the generosity of grants, like this one from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the tremendous opportunities for young people can be realized.

Chief of Podiatry Honored

Barney Yanklowitz, DPM, chief of podiatry and director of podiatry residency training at VA Puget Sound, received two honors this past spring. He was appointed to serve as the VISN 20-podiatry representative for the national VA podiatric program. His peers also elected Dr. Yanklowitz as a

Distinguished Practitioner into the National Academies of Practice (NAP). This interdisciplinary academy maintains 150 active practitioners for ten health care disciplines, and is the nation's only nonpartisan interdisciplinary health policy forum.

Nursing Excellence Banquet a Rousing Success

Each year, National Nursing Week is celebrated to honor the nation's indispensable nurses for their tireless commitment around the clock, 365 days a year. It is also a time to increase public awareness of their vital role and to mark the achievements and challenges facing the profession.

The Secretary for the Department of Veterans Affairs accepts nominations for Excellence in Nursing. One individual is selected from a national slate of nurses to receive the national honor and an award from the President. Nominees are recognized for their demonstration of patient-centered care in a VA health care setting and have demonstrated excellence that merits recognition from their peers. At the medical center's celebration this year, thirty nursing staff were nominated for further consideration/nomination.

Five VA Puget Sound nurses have received this prestigious national award in the past: Bonnie Steele, RN, PhD - Respiratory Clinical Nurse Specialist - 2001; Linda Haas, RN, MSN - Clinical Specialist in Endocrinology - 1999; Virginia Scott, RN, Nurse Manager, Alzheimer's Unit- 1995; Kevin Davis, LPN, Emergency Room, 1992, and Margarethe (Grethe)

Cammermeyer, RN, PhD - Clinical Nurse Specialist in Epilepsy -1985.

At the medical center's celebration this year, thirty nursing staff were nominated to go forward to the VISN for further consideration/nomination.

They include:

Edna Feagin, NA; Lisa Renner, LPN; Sandra Soule, RN; Andrea Litton, RN. Other honorees included: Nurse Practitioners - Eden Aquinaldo, Mary Chapmam, Michael Cornelius and Jessica Wagner; Licensed Practical Nurses - Gertrude Antes, Remy Ginez, Heidi Makupson, Cheryl Namur, Marie Simpson, Velma Woodard; Registered Nurses - Gloria Armas, Marilyn Aviles, Gilda Cruz, Norma Hall, Mary Jacobs, Marie Padriga, Aurora Santiago, Sandra Solomon; Advanced Practice (Administrative/Clinical) - Pamela Davies, ARNP, Elaine Detwiler, RN, Toni Floyd, RN, Teri Luckenbaugh, RN, Steve Rice, RN; Elizabeth Shapiro, RN, Mary Weenike, ARNP, Ellen Wilson, RN.



From left to right:
Roxanne Rusch, Teri
Luckenbaugh, Sue
Schindler, Pam Poppelwell

The Best Doctors in America Practice at VA Puget Sound

The Best Doctors in America (Copyright 2001 by Best Doctors, Inc., of Aiken, S.C.), is the result of the fifth survey undertaken by Best Doctors, Inc. The current listing was compiled by more than 30,000 doctors throughout the United States who were asked to rate the clinical abilities of other doctors in their areas of specialization. Only physicians who earned the consensus support of their peers were included. Listings cannot be bought. VA Puget Sound Physicians selected by their peers are:

Cardiovascular Disease -
J. Ward Kennedy

Endocrinology and Metabolism -
Jerry P. Palmer

Gastroenterology - Sum Lee

Internal Medicine (General) -
Joyce E. Wipf

Neurological Surgery - Robert Goodkin

Neurology - Thomas D. Bird

Ophthalmology - James C. Orcutt

Orthopaedic Surgery -
Bruce J. Sangeorzan

Otolaryngology - Allen Hillel

Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation -
Barry Goldstein

Psychiatry - Murray A. Raskind



American Lake

Seattle

Do You Wear Your Badge?

Employees at VA Puget Sound Health Care System are required to wear their VA issued picture ID badges at all times when they are on VA grounds, including the parking lots. Do not leave ID badges in your desk at the end of the day. You will need your ID to gain entry to either facility. This is a basic security precaution. Employees who refuse to wear their ID badges will be subject to disciplinary action.

Supervisors are expected to enforce this requirement with their employees. Please ensure that your employees are not only wearing their name badges but also that those badges reflect both the employees full name and service line. Do not obscure your picture and/or name with pins, stickers, or other ad-ons. If your ID badge does not look like the sample illustration accompanying this article, a new ID badge must be obtained.

If you have employees at the American Lake Division who need to have a new name badge, please call Brian Ricard at extension 71065. At the Seattle Division, call John Betts at extension 61705.



Congratulations to Team VA on another successful STP!



“Talking Trash”

The Adopt-a-Street program sponsored by the American Lake Division Partnership Council continues to enhance the environment approaching the medical center grounds. Veterans Drive, from Gravelly Lake Drive to the entrance of the medical center, is the focus of our volunteer employee and family workers. To date, seven cleanups have been conducted with a total of 49 volunteers expending over 200 hours collecting almost 100 bags of litter and other discarded items. To volunteer for the next cleanup, contact John Weber at 7-6492.



Grass Roots Leadership (Continued from page 1)

want to advance.

The second session of OLS training is currently being conducted and includes supervisors from several service lines throughout VA Puget Sound. For additional information, call: Tom McWhinnie at extension 65345 regarding the facility OLS series. John Park, extension 62090, or Wendy Riverman, extension 62866, may be contacted about Health Plan Management's role.

Department of Veterans Affairs Puget Sound Health Care System American Lake & Seattle

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VA PUGET SOUND HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

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